

# *The Job of a Trustee*

As a trustee, you are entrusted by the public to look after its interest. You are also accountable to the public. Trusteeship is a working relationship with the community, library staff and fellow trustees. It requires a great deal of time, and even more importantly, a commitment to libraries. There is a direct correlation between the quality of library service a community offers and the knowledge, capability and enthusiasm of its Board members.

## *What Does a Trustee Do?*

### *A trustee knows:*

- ◆ the organization of the library Board
- ◆ the library services and resources available
- ◆ who uses the library and who does not use it
- ◆ information needs and interests of the community
- ◆ how to work effectively in a group
- ◆ the services available at the State Library
- ◆ national library trends, standards and developments
- ◆ library terminology

### *A trustee attends:*

- ◆ every Board and assigned committee meeting
- ◆ federation meetings
- ◆ professional meetings such as Montana Library Association conferences
- ◆ other local meetings and workshops relating to library business

***A trustee plans:***

- ◆ for future growth and priorities of the library
- ◆ library policy
- ◆ active community awareness programs
- ◆ orientation for new Board members

***A trustee supports:***

- ◆ the library and the director
- ◆ the local governing body
- ◆ the community
- ◆ local, state and federal legislation related to libraries

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**Golden Rules for Board Members**

*Leave the actual management of the library to the director. It is the director's responsibility to select books, employ the staff and supervise day-to-day operations.*

*After a policy or rule is adopted by the majority vote of the library Board, do not criticize or re-voice your opposition publicly.*

*Respect confidential information. Do not divulge information regarding future Board actions or plans until such action is officially taken.*

*Observe any publicity and information policies of the Board and library. Do not give information individually but refer requests to the library director or appropriate trustee.*

*Do not hold Board meetings without the director.*

*Treat the director and staff members in an objective manner. Under no circumstances should you listen to grievances of staff members or treat individual problems on your own. The director is in charge of the staff and has administrative control up to the point where a grievance is presented to the library Board.*

*Complaints from the public are the director's responsibility. Complaints submitted directly to the Board or an individual trustee should be referred to the director. Continued problems should be taken up at the Board meeting only if policy revision is necessary or legal ramifications are involved.*

*All rules and policies must be approved by a quorum of the Board at a regular meeting.*

*Assume your full responsibility as a Board member. If you are unable to attend meetings regularly and complete work delegated to you, consider resigning so an active member can be appointed.*

*A trustee advocates:*

- ◆ to articulate the library's needs
- ◆ to seek funding
- ◆ to promote the library
- ◆ to develop good personal relations with local, state and federal government representatives
- ◆ to make the Board and library visible in the community

*A trustee remembers:*

- ◆ the library Board acts only as a whole
- ◆ an individual trustee may act on behalf of the library only when authorized to do so by the Board
- ◆ the Board does not run the day-to-day operations of the library

## *The Job Description*

Even though a library trustee is a volunteer position, becoming a trustee is like taking on a new job. It requires the same hard work and willingness to learn as does a paid position.

You might have been given a job description to review before becoming a trustee. If not, your Board may want to consider preparing one. A written job description may help future potential trustees understand the roles and responsibilities of the position.

The following sample job description shows what should be included. Boards will often set goals to keep the workload manageable. However, a trustee's responsibilities will include most of what is listed here over the course of the trustee's service on the Board.

### **Sample Trustee Job Description**

#### **Summary**

Provides governance for the \_\_\_\_\_ Public Library; establishes policy; sets goals; hires and evaluates director; establishes and monitors annual budget; signs necessary contracts; exercises such other powers, not inconsistent with law, necessary for the effective use and management of the library.

### **Responsibilities**

1. Participates in the ongoing responsibilities of the governing body, including establishment of library policies, budgeting, evaluating and supervising the library director, working with local and state government officials, and planning for current and future library services and programs.
2. Attends all regular and special meetings of the Board, and participates in committees and activities as necessary; attends appropriate library functions.
3. Represents the interests and needs of community members.
4. Lends expertise and experience to the organization.
5. Maintains an awareness of library issues and trends, and the implications for library users.
6. Acts as liaison with the public, interpreting and informing local government, media and public of library services and needs.
7. Understands pertinent local and state law; actively supports library legislation in the state and nation.

### **Qualifications**

1. Is interested in the library and its services.
2. Has the ability to contribute adequate time for effective participation in Board activities and decision making.
3. Has the ability to represent needs and varied interests of the community at large and the library.
4. Has strong interpersonal and communication skills.
5. Has the ability to work with governmental bodies, agencies and other libraries.
6. Has the ability to handle opposition and make decisions in the interest of library service.

### **Time Commitment**

The Board of Trustees meets monthly at a time convenient for members. Special meetings or committee meetings may be called as necessary at times that are convenient to members and that comply with open meeting laws.

Under Montana law, trustees hold their office for five years from the date of appointment and until their successors are appointed. Members serve no more than two full terms in succession.